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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of two instructional components, literature logs and instructional conversations, on the story comprehension and thematic understanding of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learners. Subjects were 5 teachers and 116 fourth- and fifth-grade students; slightly over half were ESL learners in their first or second year of English language arts. The five teachers had completed training in literature log use and instructional conversation. Students were randomly assigned to one of four groups: literature log only; instructional conversations only; literature logs plus instructional conversations; and control. Posttests found significant differences among treatment groups. Student in the literature logs group and literature logs plus instructional conversations groups scored significantly higher than the control group on story comprehension. Students in all three treatment groups were significantly more likely to show understanding of the story themes than the control group. Combined effects of literature logs and instructional conversations on students' essays about a story theme varied by language proficiency: for limited-English-proficient students, the combined effects were greater than for either treatment alone. For fluent English-proficient students, combined effects were not significantly greater. (Contains 39 references.) (MSE)

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RESEARCH REPORT 6

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Abstract

As part of an ongoing "component building" (Slavin, 1984) program of research designed to estimate the effects of several individual components of a Spanish-to-English language arts transition program (Saunders, O'Brien, Lennon, & McLean, 1998), an experiment tested the effects of two instructional components—literature logs and instructional conversations—on the story comprehension and thematic understanding of upper-elementary-grade students. Five teachers and 116 fourth and fifth graders participated in the study. Slightly more than half the students were English learners completing their first or second year of English language arts. Teachers had completed one year of literature log and instructional conversation training. Students were randomly assigned to one of four treatment conditions: literature logs only, instructional conversations only, literature logs plus instructional conversations, and control. Posttests found significant differences among treatment groups. Students in the instructional conversation and the literature log plus instructional conversation groups scored significantly higher than the control group on story comprehension. Moreover, students in all three experimental groups were significantly more likely to demonstrate an understanding of the story themes than students in the control group. The combined effects of literature logs and instructional conversations on students' essays about a story's theme varied by language proficiency: For limited English proficient students, the combined effects of literature logs and instructional conversations were greater than the effects of either treatment condition alone. For fluent English proficient students, however, the combined effects were not significantly greater than the effect of one treatment condition or the other.

Introduction

More than 2 million students–4% of the U.S. student population–speak a language other than English in their homes and are not fluent in English (Fleischman & Hopstock, 1993; National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1995). The number of limited-English speakers has risen over the past two decades and continues to grow. Between 1985 and 1992, when the size of the general school population remained essentially stable, the number of limited English proficient students (three fourths of whom are Spanish speakers) grew by 85% nationwide (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1995).

Although estimates vary, perhaps as many as 50% of these students are in some form of transitional bilingual education, or TBE (August & Hakuta, 1997). In TBE programs, students receive academic instruction in their native language during the early years of schooling, then transition into mainstream English classes once their English is proficient enough to enable them to participate fully in all-English instruction and activities. The purpose of TBE is not to maintain nor much less to promote academic and linguistic development in the students' home language. Rather, TBE uses the students' home language for academic instruction only as long as necessary. Once students acquire enough proficiency in English, they are transitioned into all-English instruction. Transition can occur anywhere from the early elementary grades to middle school. The timing depends upon a school's program or model, the grade at which the student entered the program, individual student characteristics and achievement, and teachers' judgment.

Recent evidence suggests that programs that maintain and promote continued use of the home language, rather than having students transition to all-English instruction in elementary school, produce superior academic outcomes in English (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Yet these programs are exceedingly rare (August & Hakuta, 1997), and the fact remains that if English language learners' home language is used academically at all, it is for a relatively brief time and generally for no more than a few years during elementary school. Once children have reached a certain level of literacy in their home language and achieved oral fluency and comprehension in English, they are transitioned into all-English instruction.

Many educators consider the transition period a positive indication that English learners are entering the mainstream (Gándara & Merino, 1993). However, transition can be problematic for both students and teachers. Students' participation in class often declines, and concerns about student achievement and referrals to special education go up (Gersten, 1996). Teacher expectations tend to drop and, along with them, students' academic learning opportunities (Berman et al., 1992). If transition is handled too abruptly, and primary language support is suddenly removed, achievement can decline precipitously (Ramirez, 1992). Transition, for the million or so English language learners in TBE programs, is a crucial period during which many students are especially vulnerable to academic underachievement. If schools are to continue using TBE programs rather than programs that support and maintain the home language throughout students' school careers, it is critical that teachers know about and use effective procedures and strategies during this very important phase of limited English speakers' schooling.

Unfortunately, educators have little research upon which to base policy and practice (Goldenberg, 1996). Teachers tend to describe themselves as overwhelmingly uncertain about the appropriate methods to use during transition (Gersten & Woodward, 1994). Even in schools and districts recognized for their exemplary bilingual programs,

transition is often a conundrum (Berman et al., 1992). Much of the existing research has focused on the timing and duration of transition (e.g., Ramírez, 1992). Far less attention has been devoted to empirical studies of effective transition instruction and curriculum (Gersten, 1996). This paper reports a study that is the first in a series of experiments attempting to tease out effective components of a successful transition program.

As part of a previous project (Saunders, 1998; Saunders & Lennon, 1996; Saunders, O'Brien, Lennon, & McLean, 1998), members of our research team collaborated with educators from a school district in Southern California to develop and evaluate an effective transition program for Spanish-speaking children. In general, our efforts have proved successful. In comparison to the typical transition program in the district, our program produced significantly higher levels of Spanish literacy achievement at Grades 3 and 4 and English literacy achievement at Grade 5, as gauged by both standardized and performance-based assessments; significantly higher numbers of students who formally demonstrated fluent English proficiency by Grade 5 and were reclassified from "limited" to "fluent" English proficient; and more positive attitudes toward bilingualism–specifically toward Spanish literacy–for significantly larger numbers of students (Saunders, 1998).

The program is complex and comprises 12 specific components falling into 3 categories (described more fully in the next section). In our current project, we are studying the implementation and the effects of the program at a number of new school sites. We are also studying the independent and combined effects of several of the 12 program components. In a previous study (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1997) we found that teachers consider all the program components important, although some more important than others. Our assumption is that teachers of transition students need precise and systematic information about the relative contribution to children's achievement of specific program components. This will enable them to make informed choices when faced with the inevitable constraints of time and resources that all teachers encounter, particularly those working with English language learners.

Using a strategy Slavin (1984) has called "component building," we are seeking to identify and estimate the effects of individual program components. Component building is "a long program of field experimental research on classroom practices that are or could become components of complete programs, but are separable elements in themselves" (Slavin, 1984, p. 262). As a total package, our transition program produces achievement results superior to those of the standard transition program used in the district where it was developed, one of the largest in the nation. But other than teachers' reports, we know nothing about the relative importance of each of the 12 program components. Our approach is thus to evaluate systematically the effects of individual components and clusters of components in order to determine which produce the strongest and most reliable effects on student learning, which produce negligible effects, and which produce no or even negative effects. In this paper we report on the first of our series of studies.

As a further consideration, because English language learners (ELLs, also referred to as limited-English-proficient students or LEPs) are often in classrooms with fluent-English-proficient students (FEPs), it is important to gauge the effects of various program components on students at various levels of English proficiency. We cannot assume that the effects are consistent across categories (LEPs and FEPs). Here again, teachers need reliable information about effects in order to plan and organize their instructional programs for different types of students.

The Transition Program

Three-Year Conceptualization of Transition

The 3-year conceptualization of transition optimally spans Grades 3-5. Grade 3 is explicitly considered a Pre-Transition year, Grade 4 is Transition I, and Grade 5 is Transition II (see Table 1). The Pre-Transition component is designed to emphasize the fundamental role of Spanish reading and writing and oral English development preceding transition. The thrust of this phase is intensive Spanish reading and writing instruction and extensive oral English development. The goal is to have all students performing at grade level in Spanish reading and writing and at the speech emergence level in oral English development by the end of third grade, which in this particular district would qualify students to begin transitional language arts.

Table 1: Three-Year Conceptualization of Transition: Goals and Outcomes

Phases	Optimal Grade	Goal	Outcome Measures
	K-2nd	• Initial reading and writing proficiency (Spanish) • Early production II (oral English)	Existing norm- or criterion-referenced measures
Pre-Transition	3rd	• Grade-appropriate reading and writing achievement (Spanish) • Speech emergence (oral English)	CARE* (district transition instrument)
Transition I	4th	• Initial reading and writing proficiency (English) • Academic oral language proficiency (English) • Grade-appropriate reading and writing achievement (Spanish)	Existing norm- or criterion-referenced measures
Transition II	5th	• Grade-appropriate reading and writing achievement (English)	Reclassification from LEP to FEP

*See Los Angeles Unified School District (1988/1996).

Transition I and II–Grades 4 and 5–are designed to make explicit the need for a concrete transition program of serious substance and duration. By the end of Transition I, students should be able to show at least initial reading and writing fluency in English. They should be able to decode and demonstrate basic understanding of end-of-third-grade English reading material (within a year of their academic grade). They should also increase their academic oral English language proficiency to intermediate fluency, such that they can participate actively in academically oriented discussions. Finally, students should continue to demonstrate grade-level Spanish reading and writing proficiency. Spanish language arts is maintained throughout the entire year of Transition I.

By the end of Transition II, students should be decoding and comprehending grade-level material in English, both in English-language literature and in the content areas. The goal is reclassification: Students have made the transition and can perform successfully in a mainstream program when they have grade-level or close to grade-level English skills.

The Language Arts Model

As part of our work on the transition program, we identified 12 instructional components that seemed most effective in serving the needs of students throughout the three phases of the program (see Table 2; see also Appendix for short descriptions of each component).

Table 2: Components of the Language Arts Model

(See Appendix for brief description of each component)

Literature studies	Skill building	Other supporting components
• Literature units (experience-text-relationship approach)	• Comprehension strategies	• Pleasure reading
• Literature logs	• Assigned independent reading	• Teacher read-alouds
• Instructional conversations	• Dictation	• Interactive journals
• Culminating writing projects (writing-as-a-process approach)	• Written conventions lesson	
	• English language development (ELD) through literature*	

*ELD through literature applies to the Pre-Transition year.

Literature Studies

Across all phases of the program, from Pre-Transition through Transition II, in both Spanish and English language arts, students study literature. We assumed that students would benefit from more extensive and intensive opportunities to work with text and to study interesting stories under the tutelage of a teacher. Based upon research conducted as part of the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program in Hawaii (Au, 1979, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) and in Spanish-speaking Latino communities in southern California (Goldenberg, 1992/93; Saunders & Goldenberg, in press; Saunders, Patthey-Chavez, & Goldenberg, 1997), we adapted the *experience-text-relationship* (ETR) approach as our framework for literature units. Through ongoing discussions (*instructional conversations*), writing activities (*literature logs* and *culminating writing projects*), and reading, the teacher helps students study the story in relationship to their own experiences and a central theme. The metaphor for this approach to studying literature is weaving (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). With the assistance of the teacher, students weave together new and existing knowledge, experiences, and concepts. The media for weaving are writing and discussion. Discussions set up writing assignments, and writings inform subsequent discussions throughout the course of the literature unit. Writing is an individual opportunity for each student to think about and articulate ideas, interpretations, and related experiences. Discussions provide a social opportunity for students and teacher to collaboratively build more elaborate and sophisticated understandings.

With respect to literacy development, we assume that through this recurrent process of individual and social discourse–reading, writing, and discussing–studying literature helps students learn to comprehend text, make connections between the text and their own lives, and develop more fully formed concepts about the themes addressed in the units (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). In terms of second language acquisition (Cummins, 1989; Krashen, 1987), we assume that literature units help provide substantial comprehensible input–language that includes slightly more sophisticated structures or vocabulary than learners can produce on their own, but that is understandable within

the total context in which it is used. The literature unit becomes a meaningful social context in which words, phrases, language structures, and concepts are used, acquired, and learned (see Saunders et al., 1998, for a more detailed explanation of the ETR approach).

Skill Building Components

As we found throughout our research and development work, literature study needs to be complemented by additional skill-building components. Students need direct instruction in specific reading comprehension strategies (e.g., predicting, summarizing, questioning), and they need daily opportunities to read texts geared to their reading level–*assigned independent reading*. Comprehension strategies are presented in two-week modules in the first and fourth quarter of the year. The assigned independent reading center runs throughout the year. Ideally, the center includes materials related to the literature unit. Students need similar study and practice experiences for written language. As part of the weekly dictation program, students study a short but carefully targeted passage from the literature selection.

English language development (ELD) through literature (developed by project consultant Dolores Beltrán) is a daily, 30- to 40-minute oral English program used in the Pre-Transition phase of the program. Instruction is delivered to students in small, homogeneous groups based on their English proficiency level. Lessons and independent activities are all drawn from a particular literature selection (typically one with predictable patterns, language structures, and target vocabulary for various domains). The focus of lessons and the teacher's talk are geared specifically to students' production level. ELD through literature is an integral part of our Pre-Transition program (Grade 3 and also Grade 2). [Note: This component is not included in the subsequent analysis as it applies only to the early grades; we offer this explanation of it here to provide for completeness.]

Other Supporting Components

Teacher read-alouds and *pleasure reading* are both designed to expose students to good literature and to support their independent reading behaviors. At all grades, teachers read to students for approximately 20 minutes at least 3 times per week. Teacher read-alouds serve various purposes: to expose students to the language of expert writers and the fluency of an expert reader, to engage students in material they may not yet be able to read on their own, and to introduce them to new authors and genres. In addition, time each day is devoted to pleasure reading. Students choose their own books and stories, keep records of their reading, and for those books they find most interesting, they complete short assignments (summaries, synopses, oral presentations, drawings, etc.). Many Transition I teachers also use interactive journals during the first half of the year, when students are making their first attempts at English writing. The immediate written response from the teacher provides both emotional support for the students and a highly contextualized and therefore comprehensible English text for them to read.

Theoretical Premises

Our transition program is a combination of the 3-year conceptualization of transition and the language arts model. Four theoretical premises undergird the program, all of which are assumed to promote first and second language acquisition and achievement.

Challenge: Consistently challenge students academically. Challenge them to think, learn, and engage intellectually.

Continuity: Achieve continuity in curriculum and instruction as students move from primary to middle to upper grades and from Spanish to English language arts.

Connections: Build upon and make explicit connections between students' existing knowledge, skills, and experiences and the academic curriculum to be learned (including language, literacy, and content).

Comprehensiveness: Address both meaning and skills, both higher-level thinking and appropriate drill and practice, and provide complementary portions of student- and teacher-centeredness.

These premises are grounded in the research literature, specifically in studies that have tried to identify the characteristics of more and less successful programs for English learners (Berman et al., 1992; Garcia, 1992; Gersten & Jiménez, 1993; Ramirez, 1992).

In this study we examined the effects of two literature studies components: *literature logs* and *instructional conversations*. Teachers rated both components as extremely important to the literacy development of transition students (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1997). The purpose of this experiment was to establish the independent and combined effects of literature logs and instructional conversations on transition and nontransition students' (i.e., limited and fluent English proficient, respectively) story comprehension (factual and interpretive) and theme understanding (explaining and describing examples of the story theme). We have evidence from previous studies that instructional conversations make positive contributions to aspects of reading comprehension (Saunders & Goldenberg, in press); our hypothesis was that literature logs would also produce positive effects. This is what the component building strategy is designed to do: Build a better understanding of individual program components and their effects on student learning.

Methods

Context

School and Population

The 1400-member student body at the urban K-5 elementary school where this study was conducted is 82% Hispanic and 69% limited English proficient; 62% of students qualify for the federal meals program, and 22% qualify for aid to families with dependent children. The school operates on a three-track, year-round calendar. At the time of the study, whether tested in Spanish or English, more than 75% of fourth graders at the school were below grade level in reading, language, and math. The school ranked among the lowest 20% of schools in the district. Over the last 2 years, the school has embarked on a large-scale improvement project, the purpose of which is to substantially raise the levels of both Spanish and English literacy achievement. School-wide efforts are underway to improve bilingual programs, English language development programs, language arts instruction, and the overall academic infrastructure at the school. Our research team has been collaborating with administrators and teachers from this school and from several other neighboring schools in the same subdivision of the district.

Teachers and Classrooms

The five teachers who participated in the study are members of a research and development team. The team is implementing the language arts model in Spanish, transition, and English mainstream language arts classrooms. Led by two instructional advisors, one of whom spearheaded the original development of the transition program (Gisela O'Brien), the team meets twice a month throughout the year to study instructional components, view videotape and live demonstrations, plan units, and analyze student work. Advisors co-teach and assist teachers in the classroom on a daily basis. At the time of the study, the teachers were completing their first year of participation

on the research and development team. All five teachers have at least 5 years of experience teaching in the upper grades. Teachers volunteered to participate in the study and received a stipend for the time spent outside the school day designing the instructional unit, developing materials, and assessing student work. All five teachers felt sufficiently comfortable with both literature logs and instructional conversations to participate in the design and conduct of the experiment.

The experiment was conducted during the last quarter of the school year. With few exceptions (described below), the experiment involved the same classroom conditions that students had experienced throughout the school year. Teachers had been conducting literature units, leading instructional conversations, and assigning and sharing literature logs all year long. Each teacher used a similar, heterogeneously comprised, four-group rotation system that allows for 30- to 40-minute teacher lessons for two groups each day. While the teacher works with one group, other groups work with the teaching assistant or independently on unit-related and other language arts assignments. Procedures developed for the experiment were based on the existing small-group rotation system.

The Literature Unit

The literature unit used in the experiment was designed by the five participating teachers and the first author. The unit featured a story, "Louella's Song" (Greenfield, 1993), about a young girl who is asked by her teacher to sing a solo as part of a class performance. Louella loves to sing, and her teacher thinks she is very good. But Louella is afraid to sing alone in front of others, and despite her teacher's encouragement, she feigns laryngitis to avoid singing the solo. When the class arrives at the designated location for their performance, they discover it is a children's hospital. Louella immediately sees the joy and heartfelt gratitude of the children at the hospital as her classmates begin their performance. Upon seeing this, she changes her mind and sings her solo, much to everyone's delight.

The word *giving* is used repeatedly at the end of the story. In this context, giving is spiritual, not material. The teachers in the study thought that students probably had an understanding of giving material things but not necessarily of giving of oneself, as in the case of Louella, who overcame her fear in order to give joy to others through her song. The theme was particularly timely for the fifth graders in this study, because the children were preparing graduation performances, and many of them were very apprehensive about performing. Through discussions as part of the lessons and activities, teachers were able to discuss with students how participating in the performance was a way of giving to their parents.

"Louella's Song" suited the purposes of the experiment well. First, students could identify with the circumstances of the story (a 10-year-old's apprehension about performing a solo). Second, the story had a strong theme that was an appropriate challenge for the students (giving of oneself as opposed to giving material goods). Third, as designed by the teachers, the unit could be completed in a week, because "Louella's Song" is a relatively short narrative (1060 words). Thus, the unit provided an opportunity to study the effects of literature logs and instructional conversation within a meaningful context: Teachers wanted to conduct the unit for its own sake, not just for purposes of the experiment. But the relatively short length of the unit, one week, allowed for rigorous experimental conditions without causing prolonged stress on the teachers or loss of instructional time for the students.

Subjects

The study involved three fifth- and two fourth-grade classrooms. Class size ranged from 26 to 31 students. Each class included a mixture of fluent and limited English

proficient students. Fluent English proficient students included native English-only (EO) speakers and former limited English proficient students whose English competence permitted their reclassification to fluent English proficient (RFEP), based on district measures and criteria. All limited English proficient students (LEP) had been receiving transitional instruction since at least the beginning of the year. Most LEP students had participated in the bilingual program; however, a small number of LEP students had, based on parent request, participated in an English language development program rather than the bilingual program.

All students enrolled in the five classes participated in the experiment. However, of the 138 enrollees, a total of 22 students were excluded from the final analysis: 3 special education students, 4 students who enrolled just prior to the study (and were therefore less familiar than other students with literature unit activities), 12 students who were absent for some portion of the experiment activities, and 3 students who were randomly excluded in order to maintain precise matching across the four treatment groups. Table 3 shows the composition of the four treatment groups (29 per group; N = 116).

Table 3: Sample and Treatment Group Composition

		Treatment groups					
Language classification	**Reading achievement (teacher's rating)**	**Read & study (control)**	**Literature logs**	**Instructional conversation**	**Lit. logs + Inst. conv.**	**Total**	**Percent of sample**
Fluent English proficient	on grade level	9	9	9	8	35	30%
	below grade level	3	3	3	4	13	11%
	severe problems	1	1	1	1	4	3%
Limited English proficient	on grade level	3	2	3	3	11	9%
	below grade level	9	11	9	9	38	33%
	severe problems	4	3	4	4	15	13%
	Total	**29**	**29**	**29**	**29**	**116**	

Design and Procedures

We used a pretest/posttest 2 x 4 design to evaluate component effects on students' comprehension of the story's details and themes. The design includes two categories of students–limited and fluent English proficient–and four treatment conditions: (1) read and study (control group), (2) literature logs only, (3) instructional conversation only, and (4) literature logs plus instructional conversation. Students in the five different classrooms were matched by language proficiency (limited or fluent) and teachers' rating of reading skills, then randomly assigned within the classroom to one of the four treatment conditions. To control for teacher effects, all four treatment conditions were carried out in each classroom. A detailed set of lesson plans, developed by the first author and the participating teachers, described instructional procedures for each treatment condition. The first author briefed each participating teacher just prior to the beginning of the study, maintained daily contact throughout the study, and debriefed with each teacher immediately following the study's conclusion. All communication between the researcher and participating teachers indicated that treatment conditions were maintained, and procedures were properly carried out across all five classrooms.

The study was conducted in three phases over approximately 10-15 calendar days. (See Table 4 for an overview.)

Table 4: Study Procedures

Phase 1: Pretest and whole class preparatory activities

1. Pre-essays on theme: Explain & exemplify
   DELAY (3-5 DAYS)
2. Brief introduction to story & read aloud of story's beginning
3. Read entire story independently
4. Pre-comprehension test: factual & interpretive comprehension

Phase 2: Experimental treatments

DAY	Read & study (control) (n = 29)	Literature logs (n = 29)	Instructional conversation (n = 29)	Lit. logs + inst. conv. (n = 29)
1		Lit. log #1 & sharing		Lit. log #1 & sharing
2			Inst. conv. #1	Inst. conv. #1
--	Storyboard & summary	Storyboard & summary	Storyboard & summary	Storyboard & summary
3			Inst. conv. #2	Inst. conv. #2
4		Lit. log #2 & sharing		Lit. log #2 & sharing

Phase 3: Post tests

1. Post-comprehension test: Factual & interpretive comprehension
   DELAY (3-5 DAYS)
2. Post-Essays on theme: Explain & exemplify

Phase 1 comprised pretesting and whole-class preparatory activities. Students wrote essays on what they knew or thought about the topic of giving. Three to five days later, teachers reviewed the plan of activities with the students, introduced the story with a prepared three-sentence synopsis, and read aloud the first page of the six-page story. Students then read the remainder of the story independently. They were given as much time as needed; all finished within 30 minutes. Finally, students took a comprehension pretest on the story. (See "Measures" for details on theme essays and comprehension tests.)

Phase 2 comprised the conduct of the literature unit under experimental conditions. It commenced the day after students read the story and lasted four days. Within the 90-minute language arts block each day, teachers conducted two consecutive 45-minute small group lessons. Table 4 depicts the order of the teacher-directed lessons and which groups participated. On Day 1, the teacher conducted literature log lessons with the literature log group and the literature log plus instructional conversation group. On Day 2, the teacher conducted instructional conversation lessons with the instructional conversation group and the literature log plus instructional conversation group. On Days 3 and 4, the same procedures were followed, this time counterbalancing the order of the literature log and instructional conversation lessons.

For the literature logs, teachers met the group very briefly and gave students a prompt asking them to write about personal experiences related to Louella's experiences in the story.

LL1: Write about a time when you were supposed to do something in front of a group of people.

LL2: Write about a time when others were really giving to you.

Students wrote their logs independently. In the 45-minute lesson, students read their logs aloud, then the teacher led a discussion about the similarities and differences between students' experiences and those of the characters in the story. In the instructional conversation lessons, teachers attempted through discussion to clarify the factual content of the story and develop students' understandings of the more sophisticated concept of giving, that is, giving of oneself.

Students in the read & study group (control) did not participate in small group lessons with the teacher; they instead worked independently or with the teaching assistant on reading and writing activities related to the social studies curriculum. The same social studies activities were completed by the literature log group and the instructional conversation group when they were not participating in experiment-related teacher lessons. The social studies activities were designed specifically to insure that students were working on worthwhile instructional content, although it was unrelated to the "Louella's Song" experimental unit.

It is important to note that when the experimental conditions–literature log only, instructional conversation only, and literature log plus instructional conversation–are compared to the control condition, or when the single component conditions (LL or IC) are compared to the combined literature log plus instructional conversation condition, these comparisons are confounded with time on task and instructional time with teacher. Students in the literature log, instructional conversation, and literature log plus instructional conversation conditions not only engaged in these lessons and activities, they also spent more direct instructional time with the teacher on the topics and materials. This study therefore allows us to address the question of whether literature logs and instructional conversations, independently or combined with each other, represent "value added" for time spent in instruction with the teacher. The literature log vs. instructional conversation comparison is free from instructional time confound, however, since students spent equivalent amounts of instructional time with the teacher in both conditions.

All students in the study, including students in the control group, also engaged in independent *read and study* about "Louella's Song." Students were given worksheets with six frames, each frame to be filled in with a drawing and caption for an important event from the story. Using this story board, students wrote a summary of the story from this prompt:

Write a summary of what happened in this story. Write as much as you can so that someone who has not read the story will know what happened.

Students devoted at least 45 minutes to this activity; some took as long as two 45-minute slots.

Phase 3 comprised posttesting. Students took the same comprehension test and completed the same essays used for the pretest. The comprehension test was administered to the whole class on the afternoon of Day 4, the last day of experiment-related instruction. Essays were completed 3-5 days later.

Measures

The same measures were used for pre- and posttesting.

Factual Comprehension: 10 questions about the factual details of the story. Answers were scored on a 3-point scale: 0 (incorrect), 1 (partially correct), and 2 (correct). 20 points possible.

Interpretive Comprehension: 5 questions calling for text-based interpretations of story events. Answers were scored on a 3-point scale: 0 (inaccurate); 1 (accurate but not complete); 2 (accurate and complete). 10 points possible.

Theme Explanation Essay: Students were asked to explain the concept of giving. ("What does it mean to be a giving person?") Essays were scored as falling into one of 4 categories: 1–No clear concept of giving; 2–Materialistic (i.e., giving things); 3–Materialistic/Altruistic (materialistic and altruistic interwoven); 4–Altruistic (giving of oneself).

Theme Exemplification Essay: Students were asked to give an example of giving: ("Describe a time when you or someone you know was being very giving"). Essays were scored into one of 4 categories: 1–No clear concept of giving; 2–Materialistic; 3–Materialistic/Altruistic; 4–Altruistic.

Scoring Tests and Essays

All tests and essays were scored in one scoring session. Scorers were blind to student identity, treatment condition, and whether the test or essay was completed as a pre- or post-assessment. Scorers were the teachers involved in the study, who were trained using answer keys, scoring guides, and rubrics. Comprehension tests were scored using an answer key with a 3-point scoring scale (see Measures). The reliability of comprehension test scores was checked by the first author, who, using the same answer key, reviewed a random sample of 40 tests (17% of 232 total). For factual comprehension questions, the first author concurred with the teacher's score on 96.5% of the items (386 of 400). For interpretive comprehension, the first author concurred with the teacher's score on 88% of the items (176 of 200). In the cases of non-agreement, scores were 1 point apart.

All essays were scored independently by two teachers on a 1 to 4 scale; in cases of disagreement, a third teacher determined which of the scores would be assigned to the paper. For the theme explanation essay, exact agreement between the independent scorers was 81% (181 of 232); another 17% of papers (39 of 232) were 1 point apart. For theme exemplification, exact agreement between independent scorers was 79%, and 20% were 1 point apart.

Data Analysis

Scores on comprehension tests were analyzed using two-way analysis of variance (treatment condition x language proficiency), with Scheffé post hoc tests. Essay scores were analyzed using chi-square tests based on contingency table analyses and inspection of post hoc cell contributions using the "Contingency Table" option of *Statview II* statistical software (Feldman, Gagnon, Hoffman, & Simpson, 1987).

Results

Comparability of Treatment Groups: Pre-Treatment Results

There were no significant differences among groups on the pre-treatment comprehension measures. We performed two-way ANOVAs (treatment group x language profi-

ciency) on factual and interpretive comprehension scores. Results on both measures were the same: no significant main effect for treatment group, no significant interaction, but a significant main effect for language proficiency (factual comprehension: $F = 8.86$, $p = .0036$; interpretive comprehension: $F = 20.03$, $p = .0001$; $df = 1, 108$). The main effect for language proficiency is of course not surprising since fluent English proficient students have a clear advantage in their command of English.

There were no significant pretest differences among treatment groups on the theme exemplification measure. No more than 10% of the students in any group received a score of 4–a clearly altruistic concept of giving–on their pre-treatment essays. A noteworthy difference did arise, however, with regard to the pre-treatment theme explanation essays ($X^2 = 7.54$, $p = .056$, $df = 3$). Post hoc tests revealed that students in the read & study (control) group were more likely than students in the instructional conversation group to receive a score of 4 (28% vs. 3%). Because the advantage lay with the control group, we did not treat this difference as problematic.

Post-Treatment Results

Factual Comprehension

A two-way ANOVA on post-treatment factual comprehension scores produced a significant main effect for group ($df = 3, 108$; $F = 7.01$; $p = .0002$) and a significant main effect for language proficiency ($df = 1, 108$; $F = 16.81$; $p = .0001$), with fluent English students scoring higher than limited English proficient students. A nonsignificant interaction ($df = 3, 108$; $F = 1.54$; ns) indicated that treatments did not affect students of different language proficiencies differently. We therefore collapsed across language proficiency and performed all post-hoc comparisons on results for all students (see Table 5; disaggregated results are provided for informational purposes).

The literature logs plus instructional conversation group scored significantly higher than both the read & study (control) and literature logs group ($p < .05$) but not significantly higher than the instructional conversation group. Students in the literature logs plus instructional conversation group scored almost a full standard deviation higher than students in the read & study group.

Table 5: POST-Treatment Factual Comprehension Results[1]

Group	Fluent English proficient (13 per group)		Limited English proficient (16 per group)		All students (29 per group)		Scheffé post hoc (between groups)	Effect size (vs. RS)
	Mean	sd	Mean	sd	Mean	sd		
Read & study (control)	13.23	2.62	12.12	3.50	12.62	3.13		
Literature logs	14.46	1.94	10.38	3.72	12.21	3.65		
Inst. conv.	16.00	1.58	13.19	4.10	14.45	3.48		
Lit. logs + inst. conv.	16.15	2.12	14.88	3.03	15.45	2.69	> RS, LL	+ 0.90
Mean	14.96	2.37	12.64	3.89	13.68	3.48		
F between groups					7.01			
p					.0002			

[1]Maximum = 20 pts.

Interpretive Comprehension

Results of the two-way ANOVA on interpretive comprehension scores were similar to those for factual comprehension: a significant main effect for group ($df = 3, 108$; $F = 6.73$; $p = .0003$); a significant main effect for language proficiency ($df = 1, 108$; $F = 10.67$; $p = .0015$); and no interaction between treatment and language proficiency ($df = 3, 108$; $F = 0.56$; ns). Again, all post hoc comparisons were performed on scores for all students (see Table 6).

The individual effect of instructional conversation and its combined effect with literature logs is clearer and stronger on interpetive comprehension than on factual comprehension. Both the instructional conversation group and the literature logs plus instructional conversation group scored significantly higher ($p < .05$) than the read & study group, although the combined effects of literature logs and instructional conversation are greater than the effect for instructional conversation alone (+.78 vs. +1.07 standard deviation units). Literature logs alone were not more effective than read & study alone.

Table 6: POST-Treatment Interpretive Comprehension Results[1]

Group	Fluent English proficient (13 per group)		Limited English proficient (16 per group)		All students (29 per group)		Scheffé post hoc (between groups)	Effect size (vs. RS)
	Mean	sd	Mean	sd	Mean	sd		
Read & study (control)	4.15	2.38	3.62	1.96	3.86	2.13		
Literature logs	5.54	1.85	3.56	1.86	4.45	2.08		
Inst. conv.	6.31	1.44	4.88	2.47	5.52	2.16	>RS	+ 0.78
Lit. logs + inst. conv.	6.85	1.99	5.56	2.73	6.14	2.47	> RS, LL	+ 1.07
Mean	5.71	2.15	4.41	2.39	4.99	2.36		
F between groups					6.73			
p					.0003			

[1]Maximum = 10 pts.

Theme Explanation

Results for theme explanation indicated a differential effect of treatment group by students' language proficiency. Table 7 provides results by treatment group for fluent and limited English proficient students and for all students combined. Data are the percentage of students in each group who received a score of 4 on their essays, indicating clear evidence of the altruistic concept of giving.

Table 7: POST-Treatment Theme Explanation Essay Results[1]

Group	Fluent English proficient (13 per group)	Limited English proficient (16 per group)	Post hoc (between groups)	All students (29 per group)	Post hoc (between groups)
Read & study (control)	46	6		24	
Literature logs	69	19		41	
Inst. conv.	69	19		41	
Lit. logs + inst. conv.	69	69	> RS, LL,IC	69	> RS, LL,IC
All students	63	28		44	
X^2	2.24	18.24		12.14	
p	ns	.0004		.0069	

[1] Numbers are the percentage of students whose essays received a score of 4, representing an altruistic concept of giving (see Measures for scale).

Looking first at the results for all students, regardless of language proficiency, students in the literature logs plus instructional conversation condition were significantly more likely to receive a score of 4 than students in each of the other treatment groups (overall chi ^{2} test: df = 3; X^2 = 12.14; p = .0069; p < .05 for post hoc comparisons between literature logs plus instructional conversation and each of the other groups). However, results for the fluent and limited English proficient groups reveal a distinctly different pattern across treatment groups. For fluent students, although there were 50% more 4s in the experimental groups than in the read and study (control) group, results were exactly the same for literature logs, instructional conversation, and literature log plus instructional conversation: 69% of the students in each group received a 4.

In contrast, for limited English proficient students, there was little difference between the percent scoring a 4 among the read and study (control) group, the literature logs group, and the instructional conversation group (respectively, 6%, 19%, and 19%). However, a significantly higher percentage of students scored a 4 in the literature logs plus instructional conversation group: 69% (p < .05 for post hoc comparisons between literature logs plus instructional conversation and each of the other groups). In short, there was a substantial combined literature logs plus instructional conversation effect for limited but not fluent English proficient students. Fluent students were equally likely to explain the theme clearly regardless of whether they participated in literature logs, instructional conversations, or both. In contrast, large numbers of limited English proficient students could explain the theme clearly only if they had the benefit of both literature logs and instructional conversation.

Theme Exemplification

A similar pattern of results (see Table 8) emerged with regard to providing an example that shows the altruistic concept of giving. Results for all students show a higher percentage receiving a 4 in the literature logs plus instructional conversation condition than in any other group (df, 3; X^2 = 7.50; p = .0575; p < .05 for post hoc comparison between literature logs plus instructional conversation and read and study; p > .1 for all other comparisons).

Table 8: POST-Treatment Theme Exemplification Essay Results[1]

Group	Fluent English proficient (13 per group)	Limited English proficient (16 per group)	Post hoc (between groups)	All students (29 per group)	Post hoc (between groups)
Read & study (control)	31	13		21	
Literature logs	46	25		34	
Inst. conv.	62	19		38	
Lit. logs + inst. conv.	54	56	> RS, IC	55	> RS
All students	48	28		35	
X^2	2.70	8.97		7.50	
p	ns	.030		.058	

[1] Numbers are the percentage of students whose essays received a score of 4, representing an altruistic concept of giving (see Measures for scale).

Among fluent English proficient students, however, although the percentage of students receiving a 4 was greater among the experimental groups than in the read and study (control) group, results for the experimental groups do not differ significantly from one another nor from the control group. In contrast, among limited English proficient students, results are substantially and significantly higher only for students in the literature logs plus instructional conversation group ($p < .05$ for post hoc comparison between literature logs plus instructional conversation and read and study and instructional conversation only). As with theme explanation, there was a substantial combined literature logs plus instructional conversation effect for limited but not fluent English proficient students.

Examples of Story Interpretations and Theme Essays

In this section we provide pre and post examples of written work for limited English proficient students in the read and study (control) group and in the literature logs plus instructional conversation group. The examples illustrate (1) what students were able to achieve by reading and studying the story on their own, without the benefit of the experimental conditions; and (2) what students achieved through the study's strongest treatment group, literature logs plus instructional conversation. Omar participated in the read and study condition; Manny was in the literature logs plus instructional conversation condition (student names are pseudonyms). Both students were limited English proficient fifth graders in the same class and began receiving transitional instruction at the beginning of the year. Both students were rated by their teachers as below grade level in reading but not experiencing severe problems.

Omar and Manny performed at similar levels on pretest measures: 55-60% on factual comprehension (11 or 12 of 20 points); 30% on interpretive comprehension (3 of 10 points); and scores of 2 on the theme explanation and exemplification essays (materialistic concept of giving). Omar's posttest results were virtually identical to his pretest results: 65% factual comprehension, 30% interpretive, and 2s on the essays. In contrast, Manny's posttest results showed gains: 75% factual comprehension, 60% interpretive, and 4s on both essays.

Interpretive Comprehension

One of the comprehension questions asked students to interpret a sentence from the end of the story: "She wanted to be part of the giving." Students were asked to

explain what the sentence meant. The line comes at the climactic point in the story when Louella chooses to sing because she wants to be part of the giving going on between her classmates and the hospital patients. In both his pre and post responses, Omar, from the read and study group, provided answers that were generally accurate. But his responses rely strictly on a literal explanation of story events: "she wanted to part of the song" (pre) and "she wanted to part of the program" (post).

(Note: Because the substance of what students wrote is the focus here, misspellings have been corrected and a few needed periods, capital letters, and apostrophes have been added to the students' samples; vocabulary and syntax are unchanged.)

Omar Pre	**Omar Post**
It means that she wanted to be part of the song. It's important because she wanted to be part of the song.	It means that she wanted to be part of the program they were doing.

Manny Pre	**Manny Post**
It meant that she didn't want to just stand there doing nothing. She wanted to sing with everyone.	She wanted to give her music to them, give them encouragement. It's important because the things she was giving came from the heart. You can't just wrap it up and touch it.

Manny's pretest response is similar to Omar's: "She wanted to sing with everyone." However, his post-treatment response reveals his emerging understanding of the concept of giving of oneself: "the things she was giving came from the heart. You can't just wrap it up and touch it." It also provides a more complete interpretation of the event in the story. Beyond just wanting to sing with everyone and become part of the group, she wanted to lift the hospital patients' spirits: "She wanted to give her music to them, give them encouragement."

Theme Explanation Essays

The prompt for the explanation essay was identical at both pre and post occasions: "What does it mean to be a giving person?" Not surprisingly, simply reading and studying the story did not, in itself, stretch Omar to a more sophisticated understanding of the concept of giving. Both his pre and post essays address only the giving of material goods.

Omar Pre	**Omar Post**
A giving person is someone who gives things away for free or buys things for other people.	It means that the person gives a lot of things to other people. And a giving person wants to give something to some one because maybe they don't want it anymore.

In contrast, Manny, from the literature logs plus instructional conversation group, shows substantial changes in his concept of giving. His pretest essay addresses exclusively the giving of material goods. His posttest essay speaks of non-material things: "give someone your time and caring . . . your knowledge."

Manny Pre	Manny Post
It means someone or something gives a lot to you or someone else. They do it because they love you or just because you're friends. She or he gives your gifts, gold, jewelry or money.	It means to give someone your time and caring. Given them your knowledge. And to stay with it whatever you are giving them. It also means to think about who you are giving to. A giving person is probably trying real hard to be giving all the time.

Theme Exemplification Essays

This was the pre and post exemplification prompt: "Describe a time when you or someone you know was being very giving." The contrasts between Omar's and Manny's pre and post exemplification essays are similar to those in the explanation essays: virtually no change in Omar's concept of giving, but substantial change in Manny's. Both of Omar's essays report examples of individuals who gave material gifts to someone else.

Omar Pre	Omar Post
One time my friend gave me a lot of pogs and cards and even 4 sega video games. He gave them to me as a present for free cause he liked me.	My sister's friend had a lot of toy stuffed bears and she gave them to my little brother and to the brothers of her friend. I gave a lot of toys to my cousin's friend so they could play with more toys.

Manny's pre essay is similarly focused on giving material goods, in particular his aunt's generous trips with Manny to the toy store. His post essay, on the other hand, provides a fairly detailed account of his father's efforts to help Manny with his school work. Manny specifically mentions his father giving "his time" and "knowledge." In fact, his closing paragraph describes his own reflections on the patience his father employed, another instantiation of giving of oneself.

Manny Pre	Manny Post
Every time my niña came she took me to Toys R Us. She would get almost everything I wanted. She would take me and my grandma for something to eat. She wouldn't just get anything she wanted. She'd get us exactly what we wanted.	One time my dad was trying to teach me my ABCs and how to read and spell and learn how to count. I was little. It took a couple days but my dad didn't give up and so I didn't give up. He used his time and gave his knowledge to me. I finally learned and I want to thank my dad. I want to be giving back to him. I'm sure he got frustrated sometimes but he didn't say, "Okay, Manny you're stupid. It's just hopeless, I don't want to teach you nothing no more."

Discussion

We began this study knowing that the language arts transition program we are investigating produces superior levels of achievement when compared to the school district's standard approach to transition (Saunders, 1998). We do not know in detail, however, the relative contribution of the various program components. That is what this line of research is specifically designed to explore. This study was the first in our component building series; it investigated the effects of literature logs and instructional conversations on limited and fluent English proficient students' comprehension of a story and its themes.

Limitations

One important limitation of this study is that students in the various experimental conditions not only had qualitatively different instructional experiences, they also received different amounts of instructional time with the teacher. Thus when the three experimental conditions are compared to the control condition, or when the literature logs plus instructional conversations condition is compared to literature logs alone or instructional conversations alone, we do not know whether the superior effects produced by different experimental conditions are due to the superiority of the instructional method or to students' receiving more instruction from the teacher. (Note that this limitation does not apply to the direct comparisons between instructional conversations and literature logs, because students in each of these conditions received identical amounts of instruction. Any difference in outcomes when these two are directly compared can be attributed to different methods, not instructional time.)

Another limitation derives from certain categories of students excluded from the data analysis. Special education students were excluded (n=3; 2.2% of the enrollment in the five participating classes), as were students who had recently arrived at the school and were therefore not familiar with the instructional procedures investigated here (n=4; 2.9%). In addition, 12 students (8.7% of the classes' enrollment) were excluded because they were absent for some portion of the study. Our results, therefore, can only be generalized to regular education students who are not new to the school and who attend school consistently.

Conclusions

With these limitations in mind, we draw three main conclusions from this study:

1. The combined use of instructional conversations and literature logs can produce higher levels of factual and interpretive story comprehension for all students, regardless of language proficiency. Students in the literature logs plus instructional conversation condition averaged higher levels of factual (77%) and interpretive comprehension (61%) than students in the other conditions. Although, as already discussed, the design of the study does not permit separating the effects of literature log plus instructional conversation from instructional time per se, time spent on literature logs plus instructional conversation seemed to be well spent in that it was associated with higher levels of story comprehension. We cannot rule out the possibility, however, that equivalent amounts of time spent with some other instructional techniques could produce comparable results.

2. In contrast to the general effect on comprehension for both limited and fluent English proficient students described above, the combined effects of literature logs and instructional conversations on the understanding of story theme depended on language proficiency. Limited English proficient students seemed to benefit considerably from the combined effects of literature logs and instructional conversations. Fluent English proficient students showed no such effect; there were no statistically significant differences on the posttest measures of students' theme understanding. Although the small numbers in the study (13 fluent English proficient students per group) make it difficult for modest observed differences to be statistically reliable (and we should therefore be cautious about rejecting the hypothesis that the combination of literature logs and instructional conversations is beneficial for fluent English proficient students), we can say at a minimum that the effects of both literature logs and instructional conversations on students' understanding of a story's theme are more pronounced for limited than fluent English proficient students.

3. The effects of instructional conversations are somewhat stronger than the effects of literature logs on factual and interpretive comprehension for both limited or fluent English proficient students. The evidence here is indirect. The comprehension scores of students in the literature log plus instructional conversation group were significantly higher than those of students in the literature log group, but they were not different statistically from scores of students in the instructional conversation group. On interpretive comprehension, moreover, students in the instructional conversation condition had higher scores than students in the control condition, whereas students in the literature log condition were not statistically different from students in the control condition. Finally, scores in the instructional conversation condition were consistently higher, although not statistically significantly so, than those in the literature log condition when the two were compared directly.

Implications

As we have previously documented (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1997), teachers see transition instruction as requiring a wide range of components, from skill-building to the study of literature. However, they lack clear evidence regarding the effects of various components on student learning. Teachers need to know that the instructional activities on which they spend time have a measurable and meaningful impact on student achievement. This study provides such evidence and has the following implications for practice.

First, teachers can use instructional conversations and literature logs together, as part of their language arts instruction, with the knowledge that as a pair they help promote students' comprehension of the narrative material they are reading. Second, if teachers have to decide whether to use instructional conversations or literature logs, they should use instructional conversations, which have somewhat stronger effects. Third, for English language learners, teachers should use both instructional conversations and literature logs, because the combined effect on understanding a story's theme is stronger than the effect of either one individually. For fluent English proficient students, however, specifically for theme understanding, both are not needed. Teachers could do one or the other, although instructional conversation would be the more efficient choice given its apparent comprehension effects.

A final implication, although not directly addressed by our design and data, is that transition students can successfully participate in a grade-appropriate language arts curriculum if they are given the kind of support provided by instructional conversations and literature logs (or, again, other approaches with demonstrable effectiveness). The story used in this study, "Louella's Song," is an upper-grade selection; the theme of altruistic, non-materialistic giving is appropriate for young adolescents. It is critical that students making the transition to English instruction have learning opportunities with engaging, high-level materials to promote academic development and success in mainstream English. Students were more successful in dealing with the story and the theme when provided with the sorts of instruction and the learning opportunities examined in this study.

We must go even further, however, and create or search for instructional strategies that produce higher levels of achievement than obtained in this study. Despite our findings that one or both of the experimental components we studied produced effects on comprehension and thematic understanding, students' absolute performance levels were not optimal. Factual comprehension for the highest achieving group (instructional conversation + literature logs) was only 77%; interpretive comprehension for this same group was only 61%. Only 69% of the students in this group could fully explain the story theme; only 55% could provide an original example to illustrate the theme. We

are encouraged by the fact that the components of this language arts program might help improve these students' literacy attainment. But clearly there is much more work to be done if we are to bring all students up to the high levels of performance that educators and the public demand and that these students and their families deserve.

There is currently a great deal of rhetoric around the topic of high standards for all students, particularly students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The challenge, as always, is to convert this rhetoric into concrete actions with measurable results. Both researchers and practitioners must face the challenge squarely and continue to develop, implement, study, and validate strategies to help all children develop the language and literacy skills necessary for success in school and beyond.

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Appendix

Descriptions of Each Component in the Language Arts Model

Literature Units (Experience-Text-Relationship Approach)

On average, students engage in four literature units during the year. Titles are chosen to fit the students' grade level and language proficiency, in particular across Transition I & II. The literature unit is propelled by an ongoing process of reading, writing (literature logs), and discussion (instructional conversations). Discussions are conducted in small groups of 6-10 students and managed through a specifically designed rotation system. The instructional framework for the literature units is called *experience-text-relationship* (Mason & Au, 1986). Throughout the course of the unit, the teacher tries to help students understand the relationship between their own experiences, the content of the literary selection, and one or more major themes that apply to the selection (e.g., friendship, sacrifice, perseverance, commitment, justice, cultural identity). In addition to those three critical elements (experience, text, theme), the unit is enriched with lessons, activities, and supplementary readings that build the background knowledge needed to develop a deeper understanding of the selection and theme(s). Typically, units culminate with a writing project (see Culminating Writing Projects) through which students elaborate on some aspect of the literature unit.

Literature Logs

Teachers divide the literary selection into chunks or manageable portions of reading, and assign a literature log entry for each chunk. Students complete the log entry at an independent center. Typically, small group discussions begin with some or all students sharing their logs. Literature log prompts might ask students to write about a personal experience related to the story, elaborate on something that has happened in the story (e.g., assume the role of the character), or analyze or interpret some aspect of the story or theme. In preparing a literature unit, teachers develop specific log prompts for each chunk, but prompts often emerge naturally from small group discussions.

Instructional Conversations (Small Group Discussions)

Throughout the course of the literature unit, teacher and students meet in small groups to discuss the story, log entries, related personal experiences, and the theme(s) for the unit. The frequency of discussions and the time allotted to them vary from teacher to teacher, but on average, students spend at least 45 minutes a week engaged in discussion. The discussion provides the teacher with the opportunity to hear students articulate their understanding of the story, its theme(s), and their related personal experiences and to challenge students while helping to enrich and deepen their understandings. Facilitated by the teacher, the small group discussions, referred to as instructional conversations (Goldenberg, 1992/93), allow students to hear, appreciate, and build on each others' experiences, knowledge, and understandings.

Culminating Writing Projects (Writing-as-a-Process Approach)

On average, students complete four major writing projects during the year, taking the pieces through the entire writing process: prewriting, drafting, sharing, receiving feedback, revising, editing, and preparing a final, polished piece of work (Calkins, 1986, 1991; Graves, 1983, 1991). Typically, these projects serve as the concluding activity of a literature unit and are directly related to the unit. The key to this writing process is

revision. Three things seem to promote meaningful revision: (a) helping students learn to share their work and receive and provide feedback, (b) discussing examples (student or published) of the kind of writing that students are working on, highlighting things that the students might incorporate into their own pieces when they revise, and (c) one-on-one conferences with the teacher.

Comprehension Strategies

Students are taught specific strategies to use while they are reading in order to monitor their own comprehension (McNeil, 1984; Palinscar & Brown, 1985). The two essential strategies involve students pausing intermittently during reading to summarize what they've read and to formulate and answer test-like questions about the reading material. Strategies are introduced during two-week training modules provided at the beginning and middle of the year. Students practice the strategies in pairs at the assigned independent reading center.

Assigned Independent Reading

Students are regularly assigned reading selections from available materials (basal readers, children's literature, non-finction books, etc.) to read independently. Optimally, selections are related to the themes and topics being discussed in the literature units. Students complete various assignments (writing summaries, answering comprehension questions, preparing graphic organizers, participating in paired and group activities) to promote their comprehension and hold them accountable for what they read. Readings and assignments are either completed in class at an independent reading center or as homework.

Dictation

In the most extensive dictation program (Seeds University Elementary School,1992), students engage in a series of dictation exercises every week, taking a cold dictation of an appropriate grade-level passage at the beginning of the week, studying the features of that particular passage and practicing the dictation throughout the week, then completing a final dictation at the end of the week. But we've found that less extensive dictation programs twice weekly are also beneficial. Two elements are critical for successful dictation: 1) explanations from the teacher about language and punctuation items featured in the dictation passage and 2) opportunities for the students to proofread and check their dictation against the actual passage.

Written Conventions Lessons

Students receive directed lessons about the conventions of written language (punctuation, capitalization, grammar, word usage). Lessons include a presentation from the teacher, opportunities for guided and independent practice, and application to writings the students are working on (e.g., literature logs, writing projects, dictation passages). The key is connecting what is studied in the lessons to the actual writing students are doing.

Oral English Language Development (ELD) Through Literature

Used in Grades K-3, the ELD program is based on a natural language approach and children's literature (Beltran & O'Brien, 1993). Literature provides a meaningful, motivational, and enjoyable context for learning and practicing specifically targeted English oral language skills. It also exposes children to English print well in advance of formal

transition to English reading. On average, students receive 30 minutes of ELD per day. Lessons are conducted in small groups organized by English language production level. Organizing groups by production level allows the teacher to focus more successfully on students' specific needs.

Pleasure Reading

A portion of language arts time is set aside for students to select and read things on their own for pleasure and interest. Students keep and review with the teacher a record of their readings (reading inventory) and often complete assignments related to the readings: preparing summaries and synopses, oral presentations for book sharing time, drawings, and so forth. Three things help promote pleasure reading: 1) teachers introduce students to numerous selections by taking them to the school library, maintaining a full classroom library, lending read-aloud selections to the students, and making specific recommendations; 2) teachers explicitly teach students how to choose and try out books (reading the cover synopsis, reading a portion of the book, reading various books from the same author); and 3) students have a chance to share and discuss with each other and with the teacher what they are reading.

Teacher Read-Alouds

At least three times per week, teachers read to students for approximately 20 minutes. Read-alouds (Trelease, 1985) serve various purposes: to promote pleasure reading; to expose students to the language of expert writers and the fluency of an expert reader; to engage students in reading material they may not yet be able to read themselves; and to increase students' familiarity with different genres of writing.

Interactive Journals

Used primarily in Grades K-2 and at the beginning of transition, interactive journals provide students with regular, non-threatening opportunities to write about topics of their own choice and to participate in a written dialogue with the teacher (Flores et al., 1991). Teacher response occurs as often as possible and provides students with examples of conventional writing. Interactive journals help kindergarten and Grade 1 students break the written language code; in Grades 1 and 2, they help students develop initial writing fluency. Transition teachers use interactive journals during the first semester of transition when students are making their first attempts at English writing. The immediate response from the teacher provides both emotional support for students and a highly contextualized and therefore comprehensible English text for them to read.

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CD-ROM

Teaching Alive!, by Stephanie Dalton (Writer) & Trish Stoddart (Executive Producer), 1998. CD-ROM. Available for Macintosh. (Call for information about Windows 95 version.)

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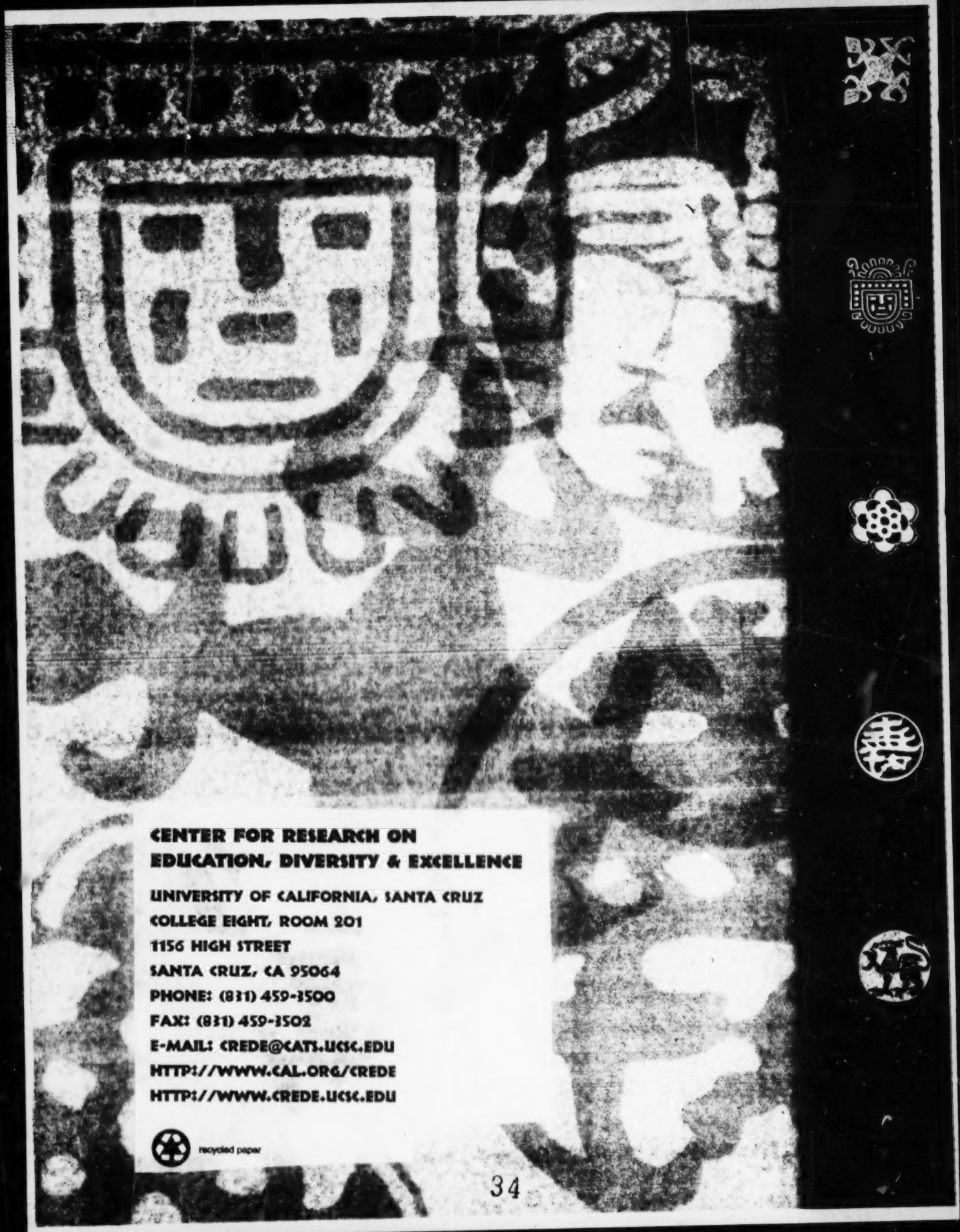

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